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ABSTRACT

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Running head: SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND PREDICTED OUTCOME VALUE

The Role of Sexual Orientation in Predicting Outcome Value
and Communication Behaviors

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to first, examine the role of sexual orientation in determining positive or negative predicted outcome value during initial interactions and second, to test predicted-outcome-value (POV) theory which posits that predicted outcome values are related to future communication behaviors. Participants ($N = 284$) completed one of two surveys. The two versions differed only in terms of the opening scenario which introduced a fictitious target whose sexual orientation was manipulated. The data from this study suggest that learning of an individual's sexual orientation during an initial encounter negatively influences predicted outcome value and subsequent communication behaviors. The results from this study remain important especially in light of recent research where interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians has been shown to increase heterosexuals' attitudes toward this minority group.

The Role of Sexual Orientation in Predicting Outcome Value and Communication Behaviors

Communication theorists and researchers suggest that individuals attempt to reduce uncertainty in initial encounters in order to increase predictability in the relationship (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Sunnafrank, 1986). Although the goals and motivations for reducing uncertainty have been argued (Berger, 1986; Sunnafrank, 1986), reducing uncertainty during initial interactions allows individuals to make evaluative decisions regarding future interactions.

What happens to future interactions when individuals learn information that remains inconsistent with their attitudes, beliefs, and values? Dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) suggests that in order to restore balance, individuals would either terminate the relationship or modify their incongruent attitude, belief, or value. Predicted-outcome-value theory (Sunnafrank, 1986) suggests that future communication would be predicted by an outcome value that was assigned during the initial interaction when the negative incongruent attitude, belief, or value was expressed. In this case, the theory suggests that the predicted outcome value would be negative and as a result, future interaction would either terminate or remain limited.

Predicted-outcome-value theory may be a useful framework for examining how sexual orientation may influence future interactions with gay and lesbian people. Research continues to show that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gays and lesbians remain negative and that this negativity is acceptable in the American society (Herek & Glunt, 1993). Recent research, however, reveals that heterosexuals who had experienced interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians expressed significantly more favorable general attitudes toward homosexuals than heterosexuals without contact (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). This research suggests that learning of an individual's homosexuality may not always be negative and in fact may predict positive interpersonal contact in the

future in the form of communication behaviors that have been shown to be associated with intimacy and liking.

The objective of this study was to examine how learning of one's sexual orientation during an initial interaction influences future relationship development through the framework of Sunnafrank's (1986) predicted-outcome-value theory. In order to meet this objective, three domains of literature were examined. The first domain summarizes the research on heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals. The second domain reviews issues of gay and lesbian self-disclosure and heterosexuals' reactions to such disclosures. The third domain examines how Sunnafrank's predicted-outcome-value theory may explain future interactions with individuals whose gay or lesbian identity is discovered during initial interactions.

Heterosexuals' Attitudes Toward Homosexuals

Although some of the negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians have been qualified (Kite & Whitley, 1996), research continues to suggest that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gays and lesbians remain negative. Adding significance to these findings is the fact that not only are the attitudes negative, but they are deemed acceptable in American society (Herek, 1988; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Kite and Whitley mention that the pervasiveness of negativity expressed toward homosexuals by heterosexuals may be "overstated or interpreted to mean that all heterosexuals hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality" (p. 336). To counter what may be an over interpretation of the data, Kite and Whitley's meta-analysis examined sex differences in terms of three specific attitudes. Instead of a global attitude measure, they compared men's and women's attitudes toward homosexual persons, homosexual behaviors, and gay people's civil rights.

Consistent with the previous literature (Herek, 1988), Kite and Whitley (1996) found that men were more negative than women toward homosexual persons and homosexual behavior, but men and women viewed gay civil rights similarly. Men's attitudes toward homosexual persons were particularly negative when the person being

rated was a gay man. Another finding that remains consistent with the literature was men's and women's evaluations of lesbians. In the Kite and Whitley meta-analysis, men and women evaluated lesbians similarly with lesbians receiving a more positive evaluation than gay men.

In a recent study by Pilkington and Lydon (1997), interpersonal attraction toward homosexuals and heterosexuals was moderated by the perceiver's prejudice level and perceptions of attitude similarity/dissimilarity. In this study, heterosexual male undergraduates rated the interpersonal attractiveness and perceived attitude similarity of heterosexual and homosexual targets who were either attitudinally similar, ambiguous, or dissimilar to the target. This study concluded that the relative effect of attitude similarity/dissimilarity on evaluations of attraction was moderated by the perceiver's prejudice level but not the target's sexual orientation.

Specifically, targets who were perceived as attitudinally dissimilar decreased low-prejudice participants' attractiveness evaluations toward both the homosexual and heterosexual targets. Conversely, perceptions of similarity increased high-prejudice participants' attractiveness evaluations toward both targets. Rather than the sexual identity of the target influencing evaluations of interpersonal attraction, this study suggests that perceptions of attitude similarity/dissimilarity play a role. For high-prejudice participants, judgments of homosexual targets were partially mediated by perceptions of attitude dissimilarity.

According to Herek (1988), heterosexual individuals with negative attitudes were: (1) more likely to express traditional, restrictive attitudes about gender-roles; (2) more likely to manifest high levels of authoritarianism and related personality characteristics; (3) more likely to perceive their peers as manifesting negative attitudes; (4) less likely to have had personal contact with gays or lesbians; and (5) more likely to subscribe to a conservative religious ideology.

Unfortunately, many of these negative attitudes toward homosexuals force gays and lesbians to conceal their sexual orientation for fear of homophobic violence or discrimination (Herek, 1988; Weinberg & Williams, 1974). This concealment of identity works against Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis that asserts that many forms of prejudice can be reduced by equal-status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. In short, it could be argued that this concealment of sexual identity or the invisibility of gays and lesbians in society allows negative attitudes to propagate. The next domain of this review of literature examines some of these issues of disclosure and heterosexual reactions to such disclosures.

Issues of Self-Disclosure and Heterosexual Reactions

Managing the self-disclosure of an individual's sexual identity has been shown to have varying effects on gay and lesbian people and heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals (Griffin, 1992; Herek & Capitanio, 1996). Because of the negative public attitude towards homosexuality, many gays and lesbians hide their sexual identity to avoid exposure and the social sanctions associated with such exposure (Weinberg & Williams, 1974). Much of this hiding is accomplished through a series of passing and covering communication behaviors that allow gays and lesbians to manage their identities and appear as heterosexual (Griffin, 1992). According to many gay and lesbian people, these learned communication behaviors and strategies are a way of survival in many environments where gays and lesbians are considered deviant and threatening (Woods, 1993; Woods & Harbeck, 1992).

Recent research, however, suggests that heterosexuals who have interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians tend to express more favorable attitudes toward these individuals and toward homosexuals as a group (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). In fact, Herek and Capitanio (1996) reported that "favorable attitudes were more likely among heterosexuals who reported multiple contact with lesbian and gay men" (p. 420). This research continues to support and advance Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis.

Despite this research that requires a certain level of minority disclosure to majority group members, self-disclosing an individual's homosexual orientation to others or being thought gay or lesbian can yield negative consequences. Gays and lesbians and those assumed to be homosexual have been subjected to anti-gay violence and harassment as a result of their sexual orientation or assumed orientation (Berrill, 1990). Uribe and Harbeck (1992) refer to Berrill's research on the anti-gay violence among 2,000 gays and lesbians nationwide.

Among those surveyed, more than 90% had experienced some type of verbal and physical abuse. Nearly half the males and nearly one fifth of the lesbians had been harassed or attacked in high school or junior high school. (p. 17)

This research is consistent with other studies examining anti-gay violence and harassment on college campuses. In a study of 174 gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 45% had been threatened or harassed, and 21% had been physically confronted or assaulted (Berrill, 1990). According to Berrill, similar findings were reported at Yale, Rutgers, Penn State, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Another important distinction in terms of attitude formation is the timing of the self-disclosure. Research suggests that there is a reduction of assigned stigma and prejudice against gays and lesbians if the self-disclosure occurs after the heterosexual person has formed a favorable and positive feeling toward the gay or lesbian person (Brewer & Miller, 1984). But what happens when either this "window of opportunity" to form an unbiased perception is not afforded the gay and lesbian person or if the homosexual person intentionally decides not to engage in passing or covering behaviors? In other words, how does learning of an individual's sexual identity during an initial encounter influence future communication behaviors?

One way of framing these questions is through a theory called Predicted Outcome Value (Sunnafrank, 1986) that examines relational perceptions during initial interactions

and how these perceptions and value assessments predict future communication behaviors.

Predicted Outcome Value Theory

According to Sunnafrank (1988), predicted-outcome-value theory proposes that initial interaction behaviors serve two related functions in individuals' attempts to maximize future relational outcomes. "First, communication is directed at reducing uncertainty about new acquaintances to determine likely outcome-values for the relational future. Second, communication proceeds in a manner predicted to result in the most positive outcomes" (p. 169). During initial interactions, individuals make predictions as to the value of future relational outcomes. If the predicted outcomes are positive, then individuals make decisions on how to escalate the communication and approach relationship development. Conversely, when predicted outcomes are negative, then individuals curtail communication and avoid relationship development.

In a program of research, Sunnafrank (1986, 1988, 1990) has supported a series of hypotheses that show the relationship between predicted outcome value and a variety of communication variables including amount of verbal communication, nonverbal affiliative expressiveness, information-seeking, intimacy, and liking. With positive predicted outcomes, Sunnafrank (1990) documented significant increases in the amount of verbal communication, nonverbal affiliation, content intimacy, liking, and interrogation and nonverbal encouragement information-seeking strategies.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to first, examine the role of sexual orientation in determining positive or negative predicted outcome value during initial interactions and second, to test predicted-outcome-value (POV) theory that posits that predicted outcome values are related to future communication behaviors. Four of Sunnafrank's (1986) propositions were tested. These propositions suggest that a positive predicted outcome value yielded from an initial interaction will increase the amount of verbal

communication, information-seeking behaviors, intimacy, and liking between interactants.

As a result of the negative public opinion associated with homosexuality and the risks involved with self-disclosure, the following hypotheses were posited:

H1: During an initial encounter, learning of a target's homosexuality will produce a more negative predicted outcome value than learning of a target's heterosexuality.

H2: Predicted outcome value will be positively related to future communication behaviors in terms of amount communicated, time spent communicating, and willingness to communicate.

H3: Predicted outcome value will be positively related to information seeking-behaviors in terms of obtaining additional demographic information as well as seeking out the target's attitudes and an understanding of why the target thinks this way.

H4: Predicted outcome value will be positively related to liking in terms of wanting to establish a friendship and communication comfort level.

H5: Predicted outcome value will be positively related to level of intimacy in terms of amount of self-disclosive behaviors, time spent self-disclosing, willingness to self-disclose, and intimacy of self-disclosure.

Because sex differences have been shown to exist among heterosexuals' attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Herek, 1988; Kite & Whitley, 1996), and heterosexual males manifest more antigay hostility on average than do heterosexual females (Herek, 1988), the following hypothesis was posited:

H6: Men will have more negative predicted outcome values as a result of learning of a target's homosexual identity than women.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 284 students enrolled in introductory communication courses at a large mid-Atlantic university. All subjects received extra credit for their voluntary participation in the study. The sample was composed of 145 males and 139 females. The mean age was 21.9 ($SD = 4.59$). In terms of class rank, 40% of the participants were freshmen, 25% sophomores, 18% juniors, and 17% seniors.

Procedures

Participants completed one of two different versions of a questionnaire. The two versions differed only in terms of the opening scenario which introduced a fictitious target whose sexual orientation was manipulated.

You recently met your new neighbor Steve. During this initial conversation, you learned a lot about Steve. It appears that you are going to be neighbors for some time. You and Steve both grew up in neighboring towns, you are the same age, you practice the same faith, and you share the same interest in music. Steve is homosexual/heterosexual and seems rather intelligent. He comes from a close-knit family and has one older brother and a younger sister.

Following the opening scenario, participants were asked to predict the outcome of future interactions with the target by completing a seven-item bi-polar measure containing the following adjective pairs: Positive/Negative, Good/Bad, Satisfying/Unsatisfying, Valuable/Not Valuable, Worthwhile/Not Worthwhile, Rewarding/Unrewarding, Comfortable/Uncomfortable. Each bi-polar adjective pair was separated by seven numbers and participants were asked to circle the number that most accurately reflected their prediction. These seven items were subjected to principle component analysis where a single factor labeled predicted outcome value was yielded. This single factor accounted for 77% of the variance and all of the items had a loading of

at least .82 and higher. The measure of predicted outcome value had an internal consistency of .95.

Manipulation check. To insure that the sexual orientation manipulation was detected, a pilot study consisting of 54 undergraduate students was conducted in a communication major's course. Participants were asked to read one of the two different versions of the questionnaire, complete the POV measure, and then turn the page over and complete three questions without referencing the front page. One of the three questions asked participants to identify the sexual orientation mentioned in the scenario. This pilot test yielded 100% accuracy with every participant properly classifying the sexual orientation of the target. Additionally, an analysis of variance was conducted in order to see if the POV measure was measuring significant mean differences between those in the homosexual/heterosexual conditions. This analysis yielded a significant F ratio [$F(1,51) = 6.93, p < .05$] with those in the homosexual condition reporting a mean that was significantly lower ($M = 17.73, SD = 1.91$) than those in the heterosexual condition ($M = 19.30, SD = 2.38$).

Communication Measures

From the POV literature, it appears that existing or new communication measures still need to be tested and developed for use in this program of research. Sunnafrank (1988, 1990) experimented and altered a variety of single and multiple-item measures. Many of these measures were applied to classroom dyads where get acquainted exercises were conducted. Following these initial interactions, participants were instructed to complete a series of self-report single and multiple-item instruments measuring perceived communication behaviors. For this study, many of these measures were not appropriate since future communication behaviors were being predicted.

Amount of talk. To measure amount of communication, Sunnafrank (1988) used a single-item measure inquiring about the amount of talk that the individual contributed to the get-acquainted exercise. Because the current study is attempting to predict future

communication behaviors, the amount of talk was measured by asking three general types of questions. The first type of question asked about amount of time one would spend communicating with the target. The second type asked how much information would be discussed with the target, and the third type asked how willing one would be to communicate with the target. Three other negatively worded versions of these questions were added to comprise a scale consisting of six items. All questions were framed using a five-point Likert-type scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The amount of talk measure had an internal consistency of .90.

Information-seeking. Sunnafrank (1990) developed a new measure to assess information-seeking behavior. This measure tapped into three information-seeking behaviors including: interrogation, self-disclosure, and nonverbal encouragement. Unfortunately, this measure yielded disappointing reliabilities of .51, .64, and .39 respectively. As a result, a different measure was developed for this study following Sunnafrank's (1986) suggestion that during initial interactions, individuals engage in higher rates of demographically directed information-seeking attempts. He also mentioned that in addition to asking demographic questions, "individuals should begin to seek more detailed information about the cognitive dispositions of partners" (p. 19). Three information-seeking items were developed for this study using the same five-point Likert-type measure used for the amount of communication measure. The first item seeks out additional demographic information by asking the target about his family, friends, experiences, etc. The second and third items focus more on the cognitive disposition by asking the target "what" he thinks about certain social, cultural, and political issues, and by asking the target "why" he thinks the way he does on certain issues. A negatively-worded fourth item was also added to the measure. This four-item information-seeking behavior measure had an internal consistency of .85.

Liking. Five items from the social attraction dimension of McCroskey and McCain's (1974) attraction scale constituted the liking measure. This measure assessed

perceptions of friendliness and sociability using a seven-point Likert-type measure with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. This liking scale yielded an internal consistency of .88.

Intimacy. Similar to Sunnafrank's (1988) three-item measure of intimacy, which focused on self-reports of self-disclosive behaviors, a six-item measure was used in this study using the same five-point Likert-type scale indicated above. These six items tapped into amount of self-disclosure, time spent self-disclosing, willingness to self-disclose, and intimacy of self-disclosure. Two additional questions were added to the measure by negatively wording the amount and intimacy of self-disclosure questions. This six-item intimacy measure yielded an internal consistency of .83.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that learning of a target's homosexual orientation during an initial encounter would produce a more negative predicted outcome value than learning of a target's heterosexual orientation. This hypothesis was supported with 11% of the variance in predicted outcome value being attributed to sexual orientation $F(1, 280) = 34.68, p \leq .0001$. Subjects in the homosexual condition reported a significantly lower predicted outcome value ($M = 34.59, SD = 10.47$) than subjects in the heterosexual condition ($M = 40.80, SD = 6.90$). Mean scores for all variables are presented in Table 1.

As hypothesized, the mean scores for the communication and liking variables were significantly lower in the homosexual condition than they were in the heterosexual condition. Among the three communication variables, the "amount of communication" variable, which included spending a lot of time communicating, discussing a lot of information, and being willing to communicate with the target, had the highest mean levels of agreement with the homosexual target receiving a mean value of 21.59 ($SD = 5.55$) and the heterosexual target receiving a mean level of 23.86 ($SD = 3.77$). The "information-seeking" variable received the lowest mean level of agreement with the homosexual target receiving a mean value of 14.36 ($SD = 3.91$) and the heterosexual

target receiving a mean level of 15.61 ($SD = 2.91$). This variable included seeking out information about the target by asking about his family, friends, experiences; by asking the target what he thinks about certain social, cultural, and political issues; and by asking the target about why he thinks the way he does.

The liking variable received mean scores that were higher than the communication variables. This variable measured how agreeable the participant was to establishing a personal friendship with the target, wanting to socialize with the target, and including the target in the participant's friendship network. This variable was also most affected by the sexual orientation of the target. When the target was identified as homosexual, the mean level of agreement was 25.41 ($SD = 7.54$) versus a heterosexual target where the mean level of agreement was 28.96 ($SD = 5.00$).

The next four hypotheses posited that predicted outcome value would be positively related to three different communication variables including amount of communication, information-seeking, and intimacy. It was also posited that predicted outcome value would be positively related to liking. Using Pearson Correlations, the four hypotheses were supported. The correlations between predicted outcome value and the four communication and liking variables by sexual orientation condition are presented in Table 2. In the heterosexual condition, positive correlations were yielded between predicted outcome value and the communication and liking variables. Predicted outcome value was positively correlated with amount of communication ($r = .70, p < .0001$), information seeking ($r = .46, p < .0001$), liking ($r = .58, p < .0001$), and intimacy ($r = .48, p < .0001$). Based on the mean scores for these variables, participants who learned of a target's heterosexual rather than homosexual orientation during an initial encounter not only formed a more positive predicted outcome value, but also indicated that in future interactions with this target they would increase their overall amount of communication. This increase in communication included engaging in more information-seeking and self-disclosive behaviors. The participants also reported liking the person more.

In the homosexual condition, positive correlations were again yielded between predicted outcome value and the communication and liking variables, however when compared to the mean values in the heterosexual condition, the predicted outcome values were significantly less positive. These *less* positive predicted outcome values were also more strongly related to a significant *reduction* in the overall amount of communication including engaging in less information-seeking and self-disclosive behaviors. In this condition, the participants reported liking the target less. Again, positive correlations were yielded for amount of communication ($r = .84, p < .0001$), information seeking ($r = .70, p < .0001$), liking ($r = .82, p < .0001$), and intimacy ($r = .55, p < .0001$).

In order to determine whether or not the correlations between the homosexual and heterosexual conditions were significantly different from each other, a test of independent correlational differences was conducted (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, pp. 53-55). This analysis yielded significant correlational differences for the amount of communication ($z = 2.96, p < .05$) and information-seeking ($z = 3.21, p < .05$) variables, and for the liking ($z = 4.16, p < .05$) variable. The correlational difference for the intimacy variable was not significant ($z = .84, p > .05$). It appears from this analysis that the correlations between predicted outcome value and the communication (with the exception of intimacy) and liking variables were significantly different from each other as a result of the sexual orientation condition. The z values are presented alongside the correlations in Table 2.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that male participants would have a more negative predicted outcome value as a result of learning of a target's homosexual identity than women. This hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance with sex of participant and sexual orientation condition (homosexual/heterosexual) serving as independent variables. This analysis yielded a significant first-order interaction [$F(3, 277) = 41.49, p < .001$] where the interaction of sex of the participant and sexual orientation of the target accounted for 31% of the variance in predicted outcome value. A Bonferroni test of multiple comparisons was conducted in order to determine which of

the predicted outcome value cell means were significantly different from each another. Based on this analysis, the hypothesis was supported with male participants predicting an outcome value significantly less positive ($\underline{M} = 29.24$, $\underline{SD} = 9.20$) than female participants ($\underline{M} = 40.01$, $\underline{SD} = 8.81$) for the homosexual target. For the heterosexual target, male participants predicted an outcome value significantly less positive ($\underline{M} = 38.31$, $\underline{SD} = 7.14$) than the female participants ($\underline{M} = 43.38$, $\underline{SD} = 5.68$), however the male participants' mean predicted outcome values were significantly more positive in the heterosexual condition than in the homosexual condition. Conversely, female predicted outcome value means between the sexual orientation conditions were not significantly different from each other.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to first, examine the role of sexual orientation in determining positive or negative predicted outcome value during initial interactions and second, to test predicted-outcome-value (POV) theory which posits that predicted outcome values are related to future communication behaviors. The data from this study suggest that learning of an individual's sexual orientation during an initial encounter negatively influences predicted outcome value. Survey participants who were introduced to the homosexual target rather than the heterosexual target predicted that future interactions with the target would be more negative, less satisfying and rewarding, and more uncomfortable.

More important to this study was the influence that the predicted outcome value had on future interactions with the target. The theory posits that during initial encounters, individuals attempt to reduce uncertainty about new acquaintances in order to determine likely relational outcomes. These predicted relational outcomes then guide future communication behaviors in the manner predicted. The data from this study support this theory of predicted outcome value. A test of independent correlational differences suggests that the relationships between predicted outcome value and the communication

and liking variables between the homosexual and heterosexual conditions were significantly different with the exception of the intimacy variable which will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

The positive correlations between POV and the communication and liking variables were moderate to strong in both the homosexual and heterosexual conditions, however the correlations were stronger in the homosexual condition. In discussing these correlations, it is important to interpret the correlations in conjunction with the mean scores for all of the POV, communication, and liking variables. As the predicted outcome value became more positive, as it did in the heterosexual condition, participants reported greater agreement that there would be an increase in future communication behaviors including increases in the amount of time spent communicating, willingness to communicate, seeking out additional information, and self-disclosing more intimate information. Conversely, as the predicted outcome values became significantly less positive as they did in the homosexual condition, survey participants reported less agreement that there would be an increase in these communication behaviors. The larger correlations in this condition also suggest that learning of the homosexual identity of the target during an initial encounter more strongly influences avoidant-type communication behaviors.

Although the means for the intimacy variable were significantly different between the sexual orientation conditions, the correlations between predicted outcome value and intimacy between the homosexual and heterosexual conditions were not significantly different from each other. This suggests that learning of a target's sexual identity during an initial encounter affects the degree to which an individual will self-disclose to the target, however the sexual orientation of the target does not significantly influence the relationship between the predicted outcome value and intimacy variable. Although the predicted relational outcome is related to the amount and level of intimate information an individual self-discloses to another person, learning of a target's sexual orientation during

an initial encounter did not seem to affect the correlational relationship significantly. In summary, it appears that intimacy remains more guarded during an initial meeting and is reserved for more mature relationships regardless of the sexual orientation of the target.

Perceptions of liking were also influenced by participants' predicted outcome values. When the target was identified as heterosexual, predicted outcome value was related to more positive perceptions of liking including agreeing to spend more time and agreeing to establish a personal friendship with the target. When the target was identified as homosexual, predicted outcome values were less positive and as a result, perceptions of liking decreased. In summary, it appears from the correlations in Table 2 that although the positive relationships between POV and the communication and liking variables in the heterosexual condition were relatively strong, the correlations became stronger and significantly different from each other (with the exception of intimacy) as a result of learning of the target's homosexual identity.

The results from this study continue to support the existing literature that suggests that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gays remain less than positive. The data also support the extant literature showing sex differences in attitudes toward gays. Overall, male participants evaluated the homosexual target more negatively than female participants. Although Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis posits that forms of prejudice may be reduced by equal-status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals, the results from this study suggests that equal-status contact may be difficult to achieve. Achieving an equal-status relationship is dependent on achieving a certain level of communication. In this study, learning of an individual's sexual orientation during an initial encounter resulted in more negative predicted outcome values and a reduction of communication behaviors and perceptions of liking, both antecedents to relationship formation.

These findings create a type of paradox for many gay and lesbian people. Because of the negative attitudes and fear of negative repercussions as a result of self-disclosure,

many gays and lesbians conceal their sexual identity and pass as heterosexual.

Unfortunately, this passing as heterosexual works against the recent research findings of Herek and Capitanio (1996) where heterosexuals who had interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians tended to express more favorable attitudes toward these individuals and toward homosexuals as a group.

Some of the research discussed earlier suggests that there is a reduction of assigned stigma and prejudice against gays and lesbians if the self-disclosure occurs after the heterosexual person has formed a favorable and positive feeling toward the gay and lesbian person (Brewer & Miller, 1984) and if the homosexual person is perceived as being attitudinally similar (Pilkington & Lydon, 1997). This research underscores the importance of gay and lesbian identity management. It appears that gays and lesbians may be able to manage better how others form their predicted outcome values by timing the self-disclosure and being perceived as attitudinally similar.

In summary, it appears that disclosing an individual's sexual orientation during an initial encounter does not produce positive predicted outcomes and as a result, relationship formation appears less likely to occur. This remains unfortunate especially for those gays and lesbians who fail to properly manage their sexual identities and/or whose sexual identities are "outed" and exposed by others.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

What some may consider a limitation in this study was the use of the term *homosexual* rather than *gay* when describing the target introduced to participants completing the survey. To some people, *homosexuality* is used as an adjective to describe sexual behavior between individuals of the same sex. Conversely, *gay*, is used adjectively to describe men whose personal and social identity is based on their homosexual orientation and identification with a community of like-minded individuals. Using the adjective *homosexual*, which some may consider to be more stigmatized and deviant, to

describe the target rather than *gay*, the more culturally and socially defined term, may have inflated some of the values.

In order to contrast the sexual orientation between the two conditions, homosexual and heterosexual were used in the absence of other dichotomous descriptive adjectives that adequately reflected this contrast. Two other considerations included identifying the target in the homosexual condition as *gay* and in the heterosexual condition as *neither* assuming the survey participants would assume heterosexuality. This consideration was not adopted because it was felt that identifying one target and not the other may introduce a bias. The other consideration included identifying the target as *gay* in the homosexual condition and as *straight* in the heterosexual condition. This consideration was not adopted because it was felt that the term *straight*, in the absence of the term *gay*, may be misinterpreted as meaning "not addicted." For these reasons, the homosexual/heterosexual distinction was used in this study.

Future research may want to alter the sexual orientation manipulation in a way similar to that done by Pilkington and Lydon (1997). Rather than labeling the target as homosexual or heterosexual, Pilkington and Lydon referred to the target's boyfriend or girlfriend in the introductory scenario. This type of sexual orientation distinction may eliminate what some may consider the confounding effects of the homosexual and heterosexual labeling.

Another direction for future research may be to explore Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis using Sunnafrank's (1986) predicted-outcome-value theory. This research could extend the findings of Herek and Capitanio (1996) where interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians and favorable attitudes were positively related. It may be worthwhile to ask research participants to record their contact with gay and lesbian people to see if contact with the minority group mediates the relationships between predicted outcome values and other communication and liking variables. Extending the work of Pilkington and Lydon (1997) where perceptions of attitude similarity between highly prejudiced

research participants and homosexual targets mediated perceptions of interpersonal attraction may be another direction for future research. Within the framework of predicted-outcome-value theory, it may be useful to not only manipulate the target's sexual orientation, but also the target's attitudes. Based on the Pilkington and Lydon study, perceptions of attitude similarity, despite the sexual orientation of the subject, may mediate the relationships between predicted outcome values and various communication variables and perceptions of liking.

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Table 1

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Variance Accounted For By Sexual Orientation

Communication Variable	Homosexual		Heterosexual		Range	F	R ²
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>			
POV	34.59	10.47	40.80	6.90	7-49	34.68*	.11
Amount of Comm	21.59	5.55	23.86	3.77	6-30	16.34*	.05
Information Seeking	14.36	3.91	15.61	2.91	4-20	9.39	.03
Liking	25.41	7.54	28.96	5.00	5-35	21.47*	.07
Intimacy	17.76	4.69	18.99	4.09	6-30	5.55	.02

Note: * significant at .0001, the rest significant at .05

Table 2

Correlations Between Predicted Outcome Value and Communication Variables, Variance Accounted for by Sexual Orientation, and Test of Independent Correlational Differences.

Communication Variable	Homosexual		Heterosexual		r Differences z value
	r	R ²	r	R ²	
Amount of Comm	.84	.70	.70	.49	2.96*
Information Seeking	.70	.49	.46	.21	3.21*
Liking	.82	.67	.58	.34	4.16*
Intimacy	.55	.30	.48	.23	.84

Note: All correlations significant at .0001. * All z scores significant at .05 except intimacy.



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